
CAPSTONE FINAL REPORT

OPEN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



Student and Faculty Success through OER Textbooks: A Colloquy

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Abstract

My capstone project demonstrates my growth as a leader in open education. I began this project with only an elementary knowledge of open education and OERs, and now that my capstone is completed I feel confident in taking what I have learned to my institution. My original project idea was to host a colloquy for my seminary sharing my experiences with winning a grant with my colleague and writing our OER textbook on the history of the Center for Christian Spirituality. Our experiences would then segue into a discussion of the benefits of OERs in achieving student and faculty success.

However, institutional changes impacted my project. My seminary merged with another seminary, which resulted in our library being absorbed by the larger one. I left my position to start a new job as a scholarly communication librarian about 2 months into the start of SPARC's second semester. My former seminary put a pause on all colloquies and community wide presentations as the merger went forward. Instead of my colleague and I sharing our PowerPoint with the community, it will be shared on the new library website when it is completed. However, I was able to present at the most recent American Theological Library Association conference and host a Q&A (this was also the organization that awarded my colleague and I the OER grant). The librarians from the seminary with whom my seminary merged also attended. Ultimately, I was able to share my experiences with OERs with a wider theological librarianship community than I had originally planned.

Project Overview

After serving on the Atla Scholarly Communication and Digital Initiatives Committee, my eyes were opened to the exciting world of open education and OERs. My colleague, [Anne Silver](#), and I won the Atla OER Invention Grant that generously supported the publication of our OER, *Living Archives: A History of the Center for Christian Spirituality*. After creating an OER ourselves, I knew I wanted to share my experiences with my seminary community. For my capstone project, I wanted to host a colloquy at my seminary not only detailing my OER experience, but also relating how OERs can contribute to student and faculty success.

While beginning to plan my project, I had the following SMART goals in mind:

1. Facilitate a discussion with students, faculty, administration, and alumni about open education through a colloquy
My seminary is over 200 years old, and this was the first time open education was ever brought up! I wanted the faculty to be inspired to create their own OER and add them to their courses. I also wanted to relieve the burden of expensive textbooks from my students. I thought that open education paired perfectly with the seminary's mission of empowering future church leaders to advance social justice. Additionally, alumni could take what they learned about open education and apply it in their own contexts.
2. Inspire faculty to adopt one OER in their courses
My seminary has about 10 courses per semester. My co-author Anne Silver incorporated our OER textbook into her two courses, *Individual Spiritual Direction* and *Group Spiritual Direction*. I also used our book in my *Research Methods* course. Ideally, I wanted to inspire the other seven full time faculty members to incorporate at least one OER in their course by either creating one themselves or remixing an existing source. I was hoping to see this goal accomplished by Fall 2025.
3. Develop an OER Action Group between the library and whoever is interested in the faculty
My plan was to first informally suggest the idea of a committee during a faculty meeting and follow up by email with those faculty members that were interested. Our Academic Dean also teaches some courses, and I thought by having him involved it would create a sense of legitimacy to the idea of adopting more open practices. I sent out a casual email to him right before the winter break, and he was very supportive.
4. Create an OER incentive program for faculty

I hoped to achieve this goal within the next 5 years. The steps I planned to take were pitching the idea to the administration and the Board of Trustees. If my idea was approved, I would start researching internal funding first with our Finance Department, and then outside funding if needed. I would also send a survey to faculty to gauge their interest.

I thought my colloquy came at the perfect time-my institution was going through many changes, and I wanted to contribute to the changes that would make my seminary better. At the beginning of the second SPARC semester, my seminary announced that it would be partnering with another seminary and sharing resources. We still retained our own leadership at this time, and I had the full support of the academic Deans.

My next step was to reach out to our Events team to determine the colloquy's venue, organize tickets, and order light refreshments. I also reached out to our Alumni Relations department to spread the word to alumni (many of whom were part of the Center for Christian Spirituality, the subject of our OER!). At this time I also prepared my PowerPoint presentation, which would be broadcasted in person and over Zoom at the time of the colloquy. My presentation had the following slides: An introduction to the Atla Grant, Our experiences writing the OER, An introduction to open education and OERs, How OERs contribute to faculty and student success, and Future initiatives (the faculty incentive program and our partnership with the other seminary).

However, in the beginning of January I was hit by unexpected news. My seminary announced that our partnering seminary was completely taking over ours across all departments. My library (a department of one) would be subsumed by the other seminary's library (a department of six full time staff plus assistants and student workers). I also received a message from the Dean that they were pausing all colloquies and other presentations indefinitely until the merger was complete. Not knowing if my job would still exist by the summer let alone the fall semester, I transitioned to a new role as the Scholarly Communications Librarian at Excelsior University at the end of January 2023.

My plans for my project had to pivot very fast. Although I was unable to present in a colloquy format with the entire seminary community (including faculty, students, alumni, and the Board), I shared my PowerPoint with the other seminary's library. It will be made available on the new combined library's website after its completion in summer 2023. Fortunately, I did have the opportunity to present my slides at Atla Annual, the annual conference for the American Theological Library Association. Fifty conference participants saw my synchronous online presentation, and my slides were made available after the conference. Our partnering seminary also attended my presentation and participated in the Q&A portion.

Now that my capstone project is coming to a close, I feel very optimistic about my ability to be a open education leader in my new role. Excelsior University is very dedicated to open education, and already has many Zero Textbook Cost courses. I am part of a

development committee to revamp Excelsior's course on information literacy to incorporate an OER textbook plus other open sources. My Academic Dean is also very supportive of the librarians pursuing professional development opportunities in the field of open education, and we are currently working on a conference presentation for Open Access Week. Although my project underwent some significant changes, it has prepared me to dive into a new job opportunity that speaks to my passion as a librarian and educator.

Evaluation

My project ultimately did not achieve my SMART goals for my seminary, but I was able to share my ideas to a wider audience through the Atla Annual conference. My experience with open education also led me to a new career opportunity. In the future, I can envision achieving my goals at my new institution.

Unfortunately, the changes at my seminary did not allow me to facilitate a discussion seminary-wide on the advantages of open education. The seminary merging with mine also did not have any experience with open education, and so any initiatives I had hoped to collaborate on would not have come to pass. However, my other initiatives have proven to be successful. I am still a member of the Atla Scholarly Communications and Digital Initiatives Committee, and we continue to accept OER grant applications every year. We also launched a new digitization grant in 2022. In addition to sharing my Atla Annual presentation online, Atla also released multiple communications to members when our OER was published. According to WorldCat, our OER is in 80 library catalogs to date! I appreciate being involved with Atla and their dedication to sharing resources related to open education. I also like to think I made an impact on the Atla community even though I was unable to at my former seminary.

Although I was not able to see any OER initiatives take off at my seminary (besides the two instances of OER usage I shared above), I am confident that I will at my new institution. Excelsior already has a solid foundation in open education, and I hope that in my new role I can watch it grow further. One of my main responsibilities as the Scholarly Communications Librarian is to build the university's first Institutional Repository. I plan to use the skills I have learned while doing my capstone-which included communication to various stakeholders while also having confidence in my own abilities-in building a repository based on openness. I am also pursuing a hub for Excelsior on OER Commons.

The faculty here have a strong background in using OERs, and I appreciate not having to start from scratch in many ways!

Looking back I am disappointed that I was unable to start a culture of openness at my seminary, but then I realize that I was able to plant the seed. When Anne and I won the grant, our Communications Department sent out announcements to every member of the community. Our OER also lives on in courses and on the library's website. Before the rapid changes, my seminary was very open to embracing openness. Overall, I am very grateful for my capstone project for giving me the results I did not originally intend to get but turned out to be much better than I hoped for.

Lessons Learned

One important lesson I have learned-and plan to apply to all facets of my life- is to celebrate the small victories! Although I did not accomplish my long term goals at my former institution, I believe the victories I did make are worth acknowledging. I was able to start a preliminary interest in openness at my seminary, and I was able to see my OER read by students in 3 different classes. Librarians are often tasked with making miracles happen at their institutions, such as running a library as a staff of one or enduring large budget cuts. As professionals we believe that we have a responsibility to make the academic experience of our students as seamless as possible, often while also juggling faculty demands and trying to further our own professional development with conference attendance and publications. It can be very easy to focus on the obstacles in our path, but in my capstone experience my mental health was in a much better place when I stopped to acknowledge my small accomplishments.

Similarly, I cannot talk about the importance of self care enough, especially while doing the capstone. At times it can be very easy to sit at the computer for long stretches while working on your capstone roadmap while also managing the reference desk. Throughout my project I gave myself limits so my work life would not blur into my personal life, such as not answering emails after 5pm. I also made sure to set aside time for exercise and plenty of sleep. I made sure that I had a strong support network around me too-especially my husband and parents. But I also relied on my co-author Anne for guidance and I am very grateful for all of the support from the SPARC instructors and everyone else in my cohort.

Finally, one lesson that I will always remember is to embrace change! When I first started the SPARC program, if anyone said that almost a year later I would be starting a new job I would not have believed it. As librarians often see when trying to introduce OERs, change can be scary for many. I know I can also be resistant to change myself, and it can be difficult for me to change a routine once I get used to it. But change is usually necessary for growth. By changing my job I am able to grow as a professional and have access to opportunities that I was not able to at my former one. Change is also a fundamental part of OERs too; their nature is to be remixed and adapted for different audiences. I would encourage other librarians to embrace change and growth as information professionals and OER advocates.



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